CHAPTER I.—CONTINUED.

The visitor had taken a seat on the piano stool and not ungracefully was slowly turning herself half round and then back. She was a comely girl and it was evident that she was the belle of the neighborhood; and it was also evident that she cared nothing for this distinction, that she had studied and read herself beyond any companionship that the village might offer, and that simply to be admired had long since grown tiresome to her. Miss Lopp never forgot that pleasing picture, the dark eyes half humorously pleading, the abundant hair caught up here and there as if by graceful and yet careless dips, the pleasing face and yet a countenance bespeaking strength of will—physical vigor and grace.

"You must not say you won't," the girl went on, giving Miss Lopp no time to answer, "until you know how much in need of a sensible companion I am. Father—and let me request you not to pay any attention to his strong expressions for he is really the best man you ever saw—well, he does everything he can to lighten my loneliness, but he can't do so very much, you know, being only a man, and I am actually hungry for some one to talk to."

"I don't see how I can resist so strong an appeal," Miss Lopp replied.

"There, I knew you couldn't say you wouldn't when you were brought to understand it all. And we'd better go now," she added, springing off the stool. "You shall have a large front room, but it has a rag carpet, woven half sentimentally by a woman that lives not far from here—by half sentimentally I mean that she thought so much of me she wove it for half price. But you don't mind that, do you?"

"What, the sentiment or the half price?"

"Why, the rag carpet, of course. I didn't know but you might expect velvet on the floor."

"My dear child," said Miss Lopp, "it was not the thought of a carpet that brought me into this neighborhood, and to tell you the truth I don't care whether the floor is covered with a rag or with sawdust."

"Oh, I just know that I shall like you, because you are not stupid with evenness of talk and kiln-dried manners. So come on and we'll go over right now."

And so Miss Lopp was installed in a large room in an old-fashioned house. Her two front windows commanded the drowsy village, the town cow that looked as though she had been patched, having so often been scalded by irate housewives; the prowling hog, the sport of every dog that found himself without amusement, the hitching rack where farmers' nags squealed and bit at one another. But the two other windows looked upon a garden, rose-tinted here and there, the dark shade lying between rows of high peas, a tangle of plum bushes, a long slope and a creek.

The office of the newspaper was found in a jumbled state, with black and light types mixed together, but with the assistance of a boy who had long been an apprentice, a decent order was brought about, and from the very first number the paper showed an improvement. The paragraphs were written with a vigor that made the villagers wink as though their eyes had lighted upon something too bright for them; and the editorials on national and international subjects were set forth with that dignity which the farmer demands that his editor shall observe. A show of frankness soon wins the confidence of a southern town, and Miss Lopp became so evident a favorite that within a month after her arrival her paper had picked up an additional circulation of fifty copies, a marvelous growth, a newspaper miracle in Broomfield.

Nell soon learned to pick up type, and was therefore Polly's closest and most valued companion. They were rarely seen apart; they strolled in the woods like lovers, and together they begged contributions to the mite society.

One afternoon, as they were going home to enjoy the cool of the garden, Nell, swinging Polly's hand as they moved along, declared that she had never been so happy. "I feel that I am useful," she said; "I feel that I am the dearest friend of a woman who knows something. And do you know what I have been thinking of? I have been thinking that we ought to make a vow never to separate. I told father the other night that I should never marry, and if you will take up the same resolution why we will live together. There's the stage, and look, there are three passengers, men, and they are coming this way."

Polly made no reply, but, leaning forward, looked eagerly at the men. They had been looking about them, but upon seeing her they came quickly forward, and as they approached one of them called: "Hello, Polly!" and then each one said: "Hello, Polly!"

Several of the townspeople were within hearing, and they loitered near to see what might follow. Polly spoke to the strangers, and then requested Nell to walk on, that she would overtake her. Nell hesitated. "Won't you please walk on?" Polly insisted. "I'll soon catch up with you."

Nell obeyed, though not without muttering an objection, and Polly stood in the road, talking to the strangers. What could it mean? Why were they so familiar with her and why should she desire to see them alone? They turned and slowly walked toward the stage coach, which was to go out again at once, to take passengers to the railway ten miles distant, and Polly talked to them in low tones and then they all nodded and smiled. Nell and the villagers were watching them, and so was old man Aimes, and just as the three men had seated themselves in the coach, the old man, commanding the driver to wait a moment, walked up to the door and said:

"I am the mayor of this town."

"Sorry for you," one of the men replied.

"Well, by Satan's hoofs, I like that, but excuse the expression for it's the strongest I ever did use; but what do you mean by sneakin' in here without lettin' anybody know you was comin' an' sneakin' out again without lettin'

"MISS POLLY, WHAT DO IT MEAN?"

anybody know why you did come? Now what have you got to say?"

"Shut the door, old man. Tra loo."

"Wait!" the old man commanded. "Who are you and what did you want with this young woman?"

"Go on, driver. So long, old top." And off they went.

"Miss Polly," said the old man, turning toward the editor, "what do it mean?"

"Your shirt collar is unbuttoned again," was all she said.

CHAPTER II.

That evening in the house of old man Aimes there was a silent supper party. Nell's flowing friendship had been rudely checked and a sharp heel had been set upon the old man's dignity. And it looked as though a coolness must necessarily follow. The strangers had brought a mystery with them and had left it in the village, and in this mystery stood Polly Lopp.

Not a word had been spoken. Polly arose to leave the table. Nell looked up and her countenance was sorrowful, not so much that there might be a compromising mystery, but that it was kept dark from her.

"Goin', Miss Polly?" Aimes asked.

"Yes, I am through with my supper."

"But wait a moment. Now there's no need of foolishness between us; we are your friends and you ought to speak out. Them men comin' here and bein' so familiar like with you will cause a scandal, and it's for me to determine as the mayor of this town whether or not I can stand by you. But first you must tell me—never mind about my shirt bein' unbuttoned and all that sort of thing—you must tell me somethin' about them men. Now will you?"

"Yes. They came and they went away. That is all you need to know."

"Not be a slatherin'—excuse my strength—no, it ain't. Where did you know them?"

"I might have met them in a city."

"Hah, what's that? Might have met them in a city, but why? That's what I want to know. Didn't you hear one of them refer to me as 'old top,' and I've been ten years mayor of this town? Hah, didn't you hear that? And why, then, should you have met them in a city, or anywhere else?"

"When I probably met them years ago perhaps I was not aware that they were going to refer to you as 'old top.'"

Nell laughed, and the old man scratched his head. "Well, now, we'll say that you couldn't help meeting them," he went on, "but we can't say that you had to become so well acquainted with them as to let them call you Polly. I gad, I don't call you Polly, and I'm the mayor of this town and have been for ten years this comin' July, I gad. Hope the Lord will in the meantime excuse both I gads. Hah, now answer me that, will you?"

"All that you need to know, Mr. Aimes, you shall know in time."

"Hah, in time? But what will the people of this town think when they come to me to find out and I put them off with your sayin' that they shall know in time? I gad, miss, when the people of this town want to know a thing there ain't no sich thing as time—the whole scheme is an eternity until they find out, and unless they find out before the next election I'm beaten as sure as a horn, and I've been mayor so long now that I can't quit. Set down here now and tell us, won't you?"

"Not this evening. Nell, I'm going out into the garden."

Polly was sitting in the summer house when Nell joined her. They were silent for a time and then Nell said: "I am so sorry that anything should have happened. I was as happy as I could be until then. Tell me, dear, what it all means, and I'll promise to stand by you, no matter what it is, for I do think so much of you. I do, Polly, I love you, in fact, and now it does grieve me so to have anything come between us."

Polly took her hand and, holding it, replied: "There are many features of life in a city, and some of them might seem strange to you. That I should have become acquainted with those men was a happening; that they should have come to this place is another happening, and neither happening amounts to enough to cause any real uneasiness on the part of my friends. So I beg of you not to let it worry you."

"Oh, it doesn't worry me so far as I am concerned, but what will the people say? Indeed, what won't they say?"

"Nell, the view and the opinion of a village are necessarily narrow; here people are suspicious of strangers and are ever on the lookout for an opportunity to suspect one another, so it would be quite impossible for me to make an explanation that would be satisfactory to them."

"But, my dear Polly, you can make an explanation that will be satisfactory to me."

"Not now, my dear, but after awhile I will. Your father is calling you."

The old man stood at the garden gate, whooping the name of his daughter, and when she had come to him, having left Polly sitting on a bench in the summer house, the old fellow said: "Nell, go it into the house and stay there till I come, and when I do come I may have some mighty interestin' news for you."

The girl passed on without replying, and the old man joined Polly in the summer house. He sat down on the bench near her, fanning himself with his straw hat, and it was some time before he spoke.

"Hotter'n it was last night," he said.

"Hotter than it was night before last, I think," the woman replied.

"I gad, I guess you're right. You always raise me one; must have played poker in your time."

"But if I were to play poker I might not always raise; I might sometimes simply call."

"Gad, I believe you have played; but that ain't what I want to talk about. See this?" He touched his shirt collar and it was fastened with a horseshoe nail. "Been a threatenin' to git it for a long time and got it jest now in honor of you, don't you see? But it ain't nothin' to laugh at. Will you let me tell you somethin'?"

"Yes, I am going to sit here a few moments longer."

"Don't exactly like the way you put it, but I reckon it's all right." He was silent, fumbling with the nail at his collar; he sighed deeply, threw his hat on the ground, thrust his hands into his pockets and leaned back against the vine-woven lattice work. And in the twilight she could see that his face was hard-set and his countenance eager.

"What were you going to tell me?" she asked.

"Somethin' powerful important to both of us, but you'll have to let me git at it in my own round-about way. By this time the whole town is discussin' the fact that three men, strange men at that, come here and called you Polly. And mebbe in the mornin' they will tell you that you better git out. Then what?"

"I'll tell them to go to a place not on the school maps, but well located in spiritual geography."

"I gad, that's the way to talk to avoid strength, but it won't do to tell 'em no such a thing. There is a way by which the whole affair may be made smooth."

"It is smooth enough now," she replied.

"I'll be dinged if it is; it's as rough as a toad's back; but we can smooth it. Now here," he leaned toward her. "I say now here, you marry me and the whole affair will be settled, for they won't dare to talk about the wife of the mayor of this town. Hah, what do you say? You see that I've got about the best place around here, and I was down the creek yesterday evenin' and that corn is goin' to turn out monstrous, hah? You can go right down to the store and trade out ten dollars' worth at a snort, hah? Then Nell can help you right along in the printing office and it shan't cost you a cent. As I told you once before, you ain't so powerful good lookin'. Your face ain't got that saft look that it ought to have, but we can't expect everything of a woman from the city, you know. Oh, I know I'm gittin' old, but I bet a dollar that I can jump over that bean pole right yander."

"I'll take the bet," she replied.

"Hah, what's that? You don't want to see me jumpin' round in the garden path at night like a toad, do you? Wouldn't like to have it said that you married a man simply because he could jump over a pole, would you? Look, don't you see I have got this here horseshoe nail jest to please you? Look how I am putting myself out."

"But you haven't told me that you love me," she said, and in the gathering darkness he could see her looking down.

"Haven't I? Well I do. Love you well enough to let you go to the store and trade out ten dollars' worth at a snort, and if that ain't love, hanged if I know what is. Yes, I even love you more than that—I'll let you trade out fifteen. Now what do you say?"

"Mr. Aimes," she said, and her voice was low and sympathetic, "your earnest pleading warms my heart toward you, and it therefore grieves me to tell you that I am engaged."

"The horn spoon you say! But who to? But not to one of them men, I hope."

"No; not to one particularly, but to all three."

"The off ox you say! But you can't marry all three of 'em."

"No, I can't; but I can wait and see which one I really want."

"Miss," said the old man, catching up his hat and arising, "you come mighty near being the blamest creeter I ever saw."

He stood there fumbling with his collar; he took out the nail, held it a moment in his hand, and then, throwing it away, said: "Thar, I have flung my love and your honor out into bushes. Good night."

There was a great deal of talk in the village, and at one time it appeared that the mite society, for whose benefit Polly had so ardently begged a nickel here and there, would issue an edict against her; but the tide was finally turned by the president of the association, a widow with a business eye. She saw that to cut off the newspaper was to throw away a valuable adjunct, and so it was agreed that Polly might remain in the society and rest simply under a mild degree of suspicion. The question was discussed in the church, but the preacher, strong in his belief that church notices and abstracts of sermons should be printed, called a determined halt.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A TRICK EXPOSED.

How Life Was Put Into a Dead Man for a Purpose.

One of Daniel O'Connell's earliest displays of acuteness happened shortly after he was called to the bar. In an intricate case, where he had been made junior counsel more as a compliment to the family than from any other cause, the question was that of the validity of a will. The instrument was drawn up in proper form, and the witnesses swore that it had been legally executed.

One of them, an old servant, was very loquacious, and O'Connell, in examining him, allowed him to talk on, hoping he would say too much. The man had already sworn that he saw the deceased sign the will.

"Yes," he continued, "I saw him sign it, and sure there was life in him at the time."

This expression was repeated so frequently that O'Connell was led to believe that it had some peculiar meaning. He fixed his eyes upon the old man and said, gravely:

"You have taken a solemn oath, before God and man, to speak the truth and the whole truth. The eye of God is upon you. The eyes of your neighbors are fixed upon you also. Answer me, by the virtue of that sacred and solemn oath which has passed your lips, was the testator alive when he signed the will?"

The witness was struck by this solemn manner of address. His lips quivered, his limbs trembled, and he faltered out the reply:

"There was life in him!"

The question was repeated in a yet more impressive manner. Again he trembled and stammered forth his stock phrase.

Finally, by dint of clever leading and suggestion, O'Connell drew from him the fact that a pen had been placed in the dead man's hand, and the legatee himself had guided it and traced the signature. But to meet the exigency of legal questioning, a living fly had been placed in the dead man's mouth. Thus was "life in him" at the time.—Youth's Companion.

A Broad Hint.

Sir Andrew Agnew, of Lucknow, a well-known Scotch baronet, was long pestered by an impudent sort of person, who insisted on being constantly "under foot." Finally, however, he dropped off, and Sir Andrew was asked how he got rid of him. "Oh," said he, "I gave him a broad hint." "A broad hint?" repeated the inquirer; "I thought he was one of those who could never be induced to take one." "By ma saul," said Sir Andrew, "he was obleeged to tak' it! For as the chiel wadna gang oot at the door, I just threw him oot of the window!"—San Francisco Argonaut.

Blind Rat Has Guides.

This story of a rat comes from England. The hero is old and blind. He lives with his family on a sewage farm, and since he lost the use of his eyes he has taken his daily airing with two of the younger members of his family. To guard against misadventures the three go abreast with a piece of stick in their mouths which the youngsters use as a tiller to steer the blind gentleman with. Thus fortified the afflicted rat is enabled to take his walks over his native sewage farm, crossing planks and eluding dogs as in the days of his youth and vigor.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

International Lesson for April 12, 1896—Parable of the Great Supper—Luke 14:15-24.

[Arranged from Peloubet's Notes.]

GOLDEN TEXT.—Come, for all things are now ready.—Luke 14:17.

THE SECTION.—Read Luke 14:1-35. The incidents recorded in the chapter may be used to illustrate the lesson text, as follows: V. 16 receives light from two other references to feasts, (1) the advice given in vs. 7-11, and (2) the persons invited in vs. 12-14; the excuses, vs. 17-20, are vain, while the real reasons are found in the cross, vs. 26-33; the new invitation, vs. 21-23, is illustrated by the invitation in vs. 12-14; the exclusion, v. 24, is illustrated by the comparison to bad salt in vs. 34, 35. Read, also, the similar parable in Matt 22:1-14.

TIME.—Probably in December, A. D. 29, or January, A. D. 30.

PLACE.—In a pharisee's house in Perea, on the way to Jerusalem by the fords of the Jordan near Jericho.

LESSON NOTES.

I.—THE GOSPEL FEAST.—Vs. 15, 16.—Jesus was present as a guest at a supper, or evening dinner, in a pharisee's house. And when one of those who sat at the supper heard of the blessing Christ had just said belonged to the ones who invited the poor and neglected to their feasts (and moved by the delightful feast at which they were, suggesting the nobler feast), said to Jesus: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Perhaps he felt assured that himself and the other Jews were sure of that blessing. Then Jesus spoke the parable of the lesson to show this Jew that while his thought was right, yet that he and the others were unconsciously refusing to join in that feast. So He represents God the Father, who prepares every good for His children and invites them to come and partake of His blessings, as a man who made a great supper.

II.—THE INVITATION.—Vs. 16, 17.—A preliminary invitation went out in order that the persons invited might have time to arrange their affairs so as to leave the time of the feast open, and to make all necessary preparations. Then they could have no reasonable excuse for not going to the feast. The primary application was to the Jews who were learned in the Scriptures. It included all Gentiles who had been willing to learn from this special nation whom God had been training as the means of redeeming the world. In our day the guests represent those who have had special advantages in Christian training, or who know of the blessings.

In the east it is still customary, not only to give an invitation some time beforehand, but to send announcements at the proper time to inform the invited guests that all things are ready. For each of us all things are ready: the atonement made, the mansion prepared, the Father willing to receive, the angels waiting to welcome, the doors open, the Holy Spirit present, duties awaiting. "The servant" represents not only Christ, but also the whole order or class of God's messengers.

III.—THE INVITATION REJECTED.—Vs. 18-20. When the invitation had come they had accepted it, but now the servant was come they all "began to make excuse." The Greek word is the exact equivalent of our "to beg off." They gave no real reasons, but rendered the most plausible excuses they could find. The first excuse was on account of property. The man who gave it lived, as do all in that country, in a village. He had bought a farm and "must needs go and see it," not look it over, but see to its cultivation. The second excuse was that of business. This man had bought five yoke of oxen and he wanted to prove them. His oxen could have waited, but he made his plans so as to have an excuse. The third excuse was that of domestic duties and enjoyments. He "had married a wife." He could not take his bride to a feast of men, nor did he wish to leave her at home. But he knew all this beforehand, and could easily have arranged to be present, had he so desired. Note that all were hindered by the wrong use of right things. There was no real incompatibility between the true enjoyment of farm, merchandise or wife, and accepting the invitation; nor is there any between discipleship and the fullest use and truest enjoyment of earthly good.

IV.—THE WIDER INVITATION.—V. 21-24. When it was made known to the master that none of those who had been invited would come he command his servant to go out "into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." In the east, rich in beggar, opulent in misery, without poorhouses, or hospitals, or other organized means of caring for and lessening misery, and with laws and social organism multiplying it, such a throng as is here described may be often seen in the city streets or squares. But still there was room. No one will ever be shut out of the Kingdom of God for want of room. The highways and hedges were without the city walls and refer to the Gentiles. The compelling force was argument, persuasion, love, entreaty. They were to overcome the reluctance which these poor creatures would feel at so unexpected an invitation to the feast of a great lord. It was too good to be true. The final teaching, is that the master's house will be filled. Heaven will not stand empty because some may refuse to enter. "None" of those who refused the invitation "shall taste of my supper."